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STATINTL

Editorials

What Is It With Vietnam?

THE NEWS about South Vietnam can be most confusing these days.

After a briefing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Tuesday by CIA Director John McCone, Chairman J. W. Fulbright had this to say:

"I don't see any sign of another coup."

At that moment a coup was under way in Saigon. The word reached Washington Wednesday morning. According to the Associated Press, there was "little surprise and no sense of crisis."

As the Latins say it, "Que pasa aqui?"

If South Vietnam is our No. 1 problem in foreign relations we seem to have a split-level approach.

While some officials issue soothing statements that things are really not too bad, others assert we are hurtling down a Vietnamese hill without a handbrake.

Former Vice President Richard Nixon declares we risk defeat in a matter of months if policy is not changed. Yet Sen. George Smathers, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, informs a Miami audience that our Vietnam policy is correct and our objectives can and will be achieved.

Indeed, what is going on here?

The new coup in South Vietnam restores Gen. Nguyen Khanh, who stepped aside last October to make way for a civilian government. It restores the status quo ante, yet

there are ominous new developments — rising Buddhist militancy and reports of a dangerous new Communist infiltration from the north.

With our men, our prestige and our national resources deeply committed in Vietnam, the American people deserve more than a babble of contradictory reports and assurances.

They must be told the whole story, the alternatives that face us and the risks involved in each. Then — and only then — when the hard decisions are made, as they must be sooner or later since the headache of Vietnam won't cure itself, we can be counted on to support what is necessary.